

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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HOODED MERGANSER BY ALBERT GILBERT WINS 1978-79 DUCK STAMP CONTEST

A dramatic watercolor painting of a drake (male) hooded merganser in full breeding plumage by Albert Earl Gilbert of Washington, Connecticut, won the 1978-79 Duck Stamp competition November 10 at the Interior Department.

Gilbert's design will be reproduced on next year's \$5 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp purchased by waterfowl hunters 16 years of age or older, philatelists, and conservationists. Revenues from the stamp are used to buy additional wetland habitat under a program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Gilbert, 38, has been a freelance wildlife artist for the past 18 years. He has never had any formal art training and this was his first entry into the Duck Stamp competition.

The artist has done considerable work for the National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and American Museum of Natural History in New York. His paintings have appeared in many conservation magazines and are avidly sought by collectors. Gilbert has traveled throughout the world to sketch and paint his subjects and earlier this year returned from Africa where he spent 6 months sketching endangered species. He is currently first vice president of the Society of Animal Artists.

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The hooded merganser is one of the more spectacular of waterfowl species because of the pompadour hood it raises and lowers at will to show excitement. It is a small, retiring bird which nests in tree cavities and is found primarily in the Eastern half of the United States and on the Northwest coast. The male is basically black and white with reddish flanks.

In his painting of a full-plumaged drake swimming on a pond, Gilbert was concerned with symmetry and balance and wanted to use the bird and its reflection to create an interesting design. His work won over those of 295 other entrants, a record for the contest, scoring 44 out of a possible 50 points.

Applicants were allowed only one entry each. A panel of five judges, made up of prominent artists and conservationists included Dr. Michael Berger, Assistant Conservation Director, National Wildlife Federation; Lonnie Williamson, the Wildlife Management Institute; Sylvia Bashline, outdoor writer; Ralph Bitely, Ducks Unlimited; and Rudy Wendelin, artist (when with U.S. Forest Service he drew Smokey Bear and several postage stamps).

Prior to 1949, wildlife artists were commissioned to provide a design for the annual stamp. Since that time, the design has been chosen by a contest open to all artists who are residents or citizens of the United States. The prestige of winning the contest has enhanced the reputation of established artists and has elevated otherwise unknown artists to public acclaim. The winner's financial reward is also significant. The Federal Government offers no prize, but commercial wildlife art dealers are usually eager to market limited edition reprints for the winner.

The annual competition is the only art contest regularly sponsored by the Federal Government. The colorful stamps constitute the longest running, annually issued series of stamps in revenue or postage stamp history.

Since 1934 when Duck Stamps first went on sale, over \$200 million in revenue has been collected and used for the acquisition of 2.1 million acres of prime waterfowl habitat. By purchasing the stamps, more than 2.4 million conservationists annually provide close to \$12 million in revenue.

The Interior Department encourages non-hunters who also enjoy the wildlife resource through photography, birdwatching, and other activities to contribute to the U.S. conservation effort by buying a stamp.

Next year's issue will go on sale at post offices on July 1, 1978.

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EDITORS: Black and white glossies are available by calling 202/343-8770.